

Illustrations of Masonry

Book 1 - Sect. 5 - The Government of the Fraternity.

The mode of government observed by the fraternity will give the best idea of the nature and design of the Masonic system.

Three classes are established among Masons, under different appellations. The privileges of each class are distinct, and particular means adopted to preserve those privileges to the just and meritorious. Honour and probity are recommendations to the first class; in which the practice of virtue is enforced, and the duties of morality are inculcated, while the mind is prepared for a regular progress in the principles of knowledge and philosophy, Diligence, assiduity, and application, are qualifications for the second class; in which is given an accurate elucidation of science, both in theory and practice. Here human reason is cultivated by a due exertion of the intellectual powers and faculties; nice and difficult theories are explained; new discoveries are produced, and those already known are beautifully embellished. The third class is restricted to a selected few, whom truth and fidelity have distinguished, whom years and experience have improved, and whom merit and abilities have entitled to preferment. With them the ancient landmarks of the Order are preserved, and from them we learn the necessary and instructive lessons, which dignify the art, and qualify its professors to illustrate its excellence and utility.

This is the established plan of the Masonic system. By this judicious arrangement, true friendship is cultivated among different ranks of men, hospitality promoted, industry rewarded and ingenuity encouraged.

Sect. 6 - Reasons why the secrets of Masonry ought not to be publicly exposed; and the importance of those secrets demonstrated.

If the secrets of Masonry are replete with such advantage to mankind, it may be asked, why are they not divulged for the general good of society? To this may be answered; Were the privileges of Masonry to be indiscriminately dispensed, the institution would be subverted; and being familiar, like other important matters, would lose their value, and sink into disregard.

It is a weakness in human nature, that men are generally more charmed with novelty, than with the intrinsic value of things. Innumerable testimonies might be adduced to confirm this truth. The most wonderful operations of the Divine Artificer, however, beautiful, magnificent and useful, are overlooked, because common and familiar. The sun rises and sets, the sea flows and reflows, rivers glide along their channels, trees and plants vegetate, men and beasts act, yet this is unnoticed. The most astonishing productions of Nature on the same account escape observation, and excite no emotion, either in admiration of the great cause, or of gratitude for the blessing conferred. Even Virtue herself is not exempted from this unhappy bias in the human frame. Novelty influences all our actions and determinations. What is new, or difficult in the acquisition, however, trifling or insignificant, readily captures the imagination, and ensures a temporary admiration; while what is familiar, or easily attained, however, noble or eminent, is sure to be disregarded by the giddy and the unthinking.

Did the essence of masonry consist in the knowledge of particular secrets or peculiar forms, it might be alleged that our amusements were trifling and superficial. But this is not the case. These are the keys to our treasure and having their use preserved, while from the recollection of the lessons they inculcate, the well informed Mason derives instruction; he draws them to a near inspection; he views them through a proper medium; he adverts to the circumference which gave them rise; and he dwells upon the tenets they convey. Finding them replete with useful information, he prizes them as sacred; and convinced of their propriety, he estimates their value from their utility.

Many persons are deluded by the vague supposition that our mysteries are merely nominal; that the practices established among us are frivolous; and that our ceremonies may be adopted, or waved, at pleasure. On this false foundation, we find them hurrying through all the degrees of the Order, without adverting to the propriety of one step they pursue, or possessing a single qualification requisite for advancement. Passing through the usual formalities, they consider themselves entitled to rank as master of the art, solicit and accept offices, and assume the government of lodges, equally and assume the government of lodges, equally unacquainted with the rules of the institution they pretend to support, or the nature of the trust reposed in them. The consequences are obvious; anarchy and confusion ensue, and the substance is left in shadow. Hence men eminent for ability, rank, and fortune, are often led to

view the honours of Masonry with such indifference, that when their patronage is solicited, they accept offices with reluctance, or reject them with disdain.

Masonry has long laboured under these disadvantages, and every zealous friend to the Order must earnestly wish for a correction of the abuse. Of late years it must be acknowledged, that Lodges are in general better regulated, and the good effects of such government are sufficiently displayed in the proper observance of the general regulations.

Were brethren who preside over Lodges, properly instructed previous to their appointment, and regularly apprized of the importance of their respective offices, a general reformation would speedily take place. This would establish the propriety of our government, and lead men to acknowledge; that our honours were deservedly conferred. Till prudent actions shall distinguish our title to the honours of Masonry, and our regular deportment display the influence and utility of our rules, the world in general will not be led to reconcile our proceedings with the tenets of the profession.

Sect. 7 - Few Societies exempted from censure. Irregularities of Masons no argument against the Institution.

Among the various societies of men, few, if any, are wholly exempted from censure. Friendship, however valuable in itself, however universal in its pretensions, has seldom operated so powerfully in general associations, as to promote that sincere attachment to the welfare and prosperity of each other, which is necessary to constitute true happiness. This may be ascribed to sundry causes, but none with more propriety, than to the reprehensible motives, which too frequently lead men to a participation of social entertainment. If to pass an idle hour, to oblige a friend, or probably to gratify an irregular indulgence, be our only inducement to mix in company, is it surprising that the important duties of society should be neglected, and that, in the quick circulation of the cheerful glass, our noble faculties should be sometimes buried in the cup of ebriety.

It is an obvious truth, that the privileges of Masonry have long been prostituted for unworthy considerations, and hence their good effects have not been so conspicuous. Many have enrolled their names in our records for the mere purposes of conviviality, without inquiring into the nature of the particular engagements to which they are subjected by becoming Masons. Several have been prompted by motives of interest,

and many introduced to gratify an idle curiosity, or to please as jolly companions. A general odium, or at least a careless indifference, has been the result of such conduct. But the evil stops not here. Persons of the description, ignorant of the true nature of the institution, probably without any real defect in the own morals, are induced to recommend others of the same cast, to join the society for the same purpose. Hence the true knowledge of the art decreases with the increase of its members, the most valuable part of Masonry is turned into ridicule; while the dissipation of luxury and intemperance bury in oblivion principles, which might have dignified the most exalted characters.

When we consider the variety of members of which the society of Masons is composed, and the small number who are really conversant with the tenets of the institution, we cannot wonder that so few should be distinguished for exemplary lives. From persons who are precipitately introduced into the mysteries of the art without the requisite qualifications, it cannot be expected that much regard will be paid to the observance of duties which they perceive to be openly violated by the own institution; and it is an incontrovertible truth; that such is the unhappy bias in the disposition of some men, though the fairest and best ideas were imprinted on the mind, they are so careless of their own reputation as to disregard the most instructive of lessons. We have reason to regret, that even persons distinguished for a knowledge in the art, are too frequently induced to violate the rules to which a pretended conformity has gained them applause. The hypocrisy is soon unveiled: no sooner are they liberated from the trammels, as they conceive, of a regular and virtuous conduct in the government of the Lodge, than, by improperly abusing the innocent and cheerful repast, they become slaves to vice and intemperance, and not only disgrace themselves, but reflect dishonour on the fraternity. By such indiscretion, the best of the institution is brought into contempt, and the more deserving part of the community justly conceives a prejudice against the society, of which it is ever afterwards difficult to wipe off the impression.

But if some do transgress, no wise man will thence argue against the whole fraternity for the errors of a few individuals. Were the wicked lives of men admitted as an argument against the religion, which they profess, the wisest, the wisest and most judicious establishment, might be exposed, to censure. It may be averred in favour of Masonry, that whatever imperfections may be found among its professors, the institution countenances no deviation from the rules of right reason. Those who

violate the laws, or infringe on good order, are kindly admonished by secret monitors; and when these have not the intended effect, public reprehension becomes necessary; at last, when every mild endeavour to effect a reformation is of no avail, they are expelled the Lodge, as unfit members of the society.

Vain, therefore, is each idle surmise against the plan of our government; while our laws are properly supported, they will be proof against every attack of our most inveterate enemies. Men are not aware, that by decrying any laudable system, they derogate from the dignity of human nature itself, and from that good order and wise disposition of things, which the almighty Author of the world has framed for the government of mankind, and established as the basis of the moral system. Friendship and social delights can never be the object of reproach; nor can that wisdom which hoary Time has sanctified, be subject to ridicule. Whoever attempts to censure what he does not comprehend, degrades himself; and the generous heart will always be led to pity the mistakes of such ignorant presumptions.